

Duffey House
203 S. Fairfax Street
Alexandria, Virginia

HABS No. VA-454

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PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Washington 25, D.C.

Duffey House
203 S. Fairfax Street
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Present Owner: Beer and Jacobs, Realtors

Present Occupant and Use: Being remodeled for sale

Description

Good example of small frame house associated with earliest building types in Alexandria; side stair hall with single room. Front and back. Weather boarding has been renewed and Victorian sash substituted in front for small paned windows. The house is unusual for four tightly packed windows upstairs and the wood covering over brick foundation (locally not an unusual practice).

Number of stories: 2 ½ with frame ell.

Notable events and occupants

Rehabilitation of this house and the interest occasioned in its acquisition by Beer and Jacobs, Alexandria Realtors, have stimulated study resulting in additional information. Historically it has been determined that the nucleus of the structure was formerly Dr. William Brown's medical office.

Stripping of the walls revealed a most interesting evolution along with other details worth recording. The house was built as a two-story structure with single room upstairs and down and underlying stone basement. The original chimney was located in approximately the same position as now and there had been a steep stair from to the second floor. Enough noggin remained to show this type of construction. Overhead joists and flooring has been exposed and whitewashed for ceilings. Original gable roof had a lower pitch and the boxed rafters with bed mould painted barn red could still be seen at the junction with the later ell.

Apparently there was a detached building at the rear which was incorporated into the rear ell; in other words, additions were made by filling-in the gap between, and by the attachment of the stairhall with vestibule (perhaps still later, or early in the nineteenth century). Supports for the stairway contributed a tie with the maritime past of Alexandria, for they were none other than salvaged templates used in shipbuilding.

Remains of an early foundation indicated a brick kitchen with quadrant where juncture had been made to the rear wall of the house. Beneath the brick section was a vaulted tunnel about twelve feet in length and whose original function is not yet definitely established. It would appear to have been intended as wine vault or chamber for food storage (perhaps used in conjunction with ice).

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The Duffeys which have owned this house for a great many years, were a silversmithing family through four generations. When the cornerstone of the United States Capital was laid in 1793, President Washington officiated at the ceremony, using a small silver trowel designed by John Duffey. This piece was later reproduced by his son John Hurd Duffey, to provide an auxiliary for the more delicate predecessor. John Duffey's grandson, Major George Duffey, succeeded to the family business, but sometime before 1861 was a town official, resuming the post after service with the Confederate Army. He is credited with the preservation of some of the Alexandria's earliest records. Major Duffey's son in turn followed the same craft.

References: HABI form, prepared by T. Russell Jones and Worth Bailey,
HABS, National Park Service, December, 1958.

Approved Dick Luthin Date Feb. 16, 1959
Chief Architect

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